



## U.S. Revenue Cutter Service & U.S. Revenue Marine



Uniforms & Devices  
to 1907

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**U.S.C.G. RETIRED**

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## **1790 through 1830s**

From the founding of the Revenue Service in 1790, to the present-day Coast Guard, the military aspect of the service has been unmistakable. Alexander Hamilton emphasized the need for commissioned officers in this naval service. Until the U.S. Navy was reestablished in 1797 - after being disbanded at the close of the American Revolution - the Revenue service was the nation's only naval entity and there was a definite need for visible symbols of authority. A standardized uniform was the result. The history of these uniforms reflects both the traditions and roles of the Revenue Service and the Coast Guard, as well as the fashions of the day.

The early history of Revenue Service uniforms is vague to non-existent. The scarcity of information is due in part to two fires at the Treasury Department building in Washington. The British destroyed most of the records when they torched government buildings in 1814 and another conflagration in 1833 destroyed even more documents.

In any event, the early uniform must have been similar to that of the Continental Navy. In 1776, the officer's uniform consisted of a blue coat with red lapels and cuffs, yellow brass buttons, a red waistcoat, blue breeches, white stockings and a tri-cornered hat. There was even disagreement in the navy concerning this uniform. John Paul Jones and others substituted white for the red decorations and blue breeches. No regulations or contemporary illustrations of the earliest Revenue service uniforms have been found.

The enlisted seaman's outfit was more of a matter of tradition than regulation, both in the Revenue service and Navy. The bell-bottomed trousers were easily rolled to the knee for deck work. The black neckerchief could be worn as a sweat cloth. Tradition has it that the color black was in memory of the death of British Admiral Horatio Nelson, but from a practical standpoint, black did not show tar stains. (Tar was used extensively on wooden ships - particularly for a waterproof coating for the rigging.) In the days of sail, long hair was common for sailors, who wore it in a pigtail, probably to prevent it from tangling in the rigging, and coated it with tar - again to prevent loose strands from snagging (hence the sailor's nickname Jack Tar). The jumper's wide collar - which was originally detachable - also prevented tar stains on the body of the uniform.

Finally, the enlisted sailor's short jacket allowed freedom of movement in mounting the ratlines, manning the footropes and other sailing necessities. Any uniformity in seamen's uniforms was strictly the result of similarities of garments sold in the slop stores - the early variation of the ship's store.

As sailors tended to be proficient with needle and thread, many made their own uniforms and followed their shipmates patterns. Individuality could be had by a wide variety of embroidered decorations, particularly on the edges of the collar and cuffs. Regulations for enlisted men's uniforms in the Revenue service did not appear until 1834.

The earliest surviving written description of a Revenue service uniform dates from 1819. The officer was described as outfitted in a "neat and becoming suit of blue, a body coat, trimmed with brass buttons, having for a design an eagle perched upon an anchor surrounded by stars. The pants and vests were

blue, with tall, round hats, black cockades, leather stocks and cut and thrust swords."

This body coat was double-breasted and swallow-tailed, with six buttons per lapel and four on the skirts, plus one on each corner of the collar. The leather stock was a wide band worn around and over the shirt collar leaving only the flared edge of the collar protruding above. The uncomfortable but fashionable stock was eventually replaced by the necktie. The "modern" pants had only recently been introduced - old fashioned knee breeches were last seen in Navy regulations in 1813.

Ranks were distinguished by the epaulettes and probably conformed to Navy practice. In the early service, there were only three officer grades in any case. Captains wore two epaulettes, senior lieutenants wore only a right epaulette and junior lieutenants, a left epaulette. Rank may also have been indicated by the number of buttons in various places, another common uniform practice of the day. The tall, black, round headgear were referred to as stovepipe hats, and sported a cockade - a ribbon rosette decoration on the side.

The first existing Revenue service regulations regarding uniforms appeared in 1830, under Treasury Secretary Samuel D. Ingham. It is doubtful that earlier regulations existed and it appears that there had been little uniformity in any event. One old veteran stated that the officers "paid but little attention to dress . . . and adapted such patterns as the caprice of the commanding officer selected."

Before 1832, the existence of distinctive Revenue service uniforms was further clouded by regulations which allowed U.S. Naval officers to hold Revenue service commissions while on furlough from their own service. Many such officers refused to relinquish their Navy uniforms while commanding their Revenue vessel - a practice no doubt confusing and frustrating to both enlisted men and officers.

Under the 1830 regulations, the full dress captain's outfit was blue with nine buttons per lapel, two on the collar, four on the cuffs and six more on the skirts. Yellow braid closed each seam of the coat, the outer seam of the pants and the seams of the nine button buff vest. The high crowned black hat had a black cockade and eagle button on the left.

The undress uniform apparently dispensed with the braid and had narrow lace on the shoulders rather than the prescribed epaulettes of the full dress. Lieutenants had fewer buttons on the cuff, three for first lieutenant, two for second lieutenant. In full dress, each wore one epaulette. First lieutenants wore one epaulette on the right shoulder and second lieutenants, one epaulette on the left.

This blue uniform met with immediate criticism and within a year the regulations were altered, doing away with the abundance of yellow braid trim. Shortly afterwards, the collar and cuff buttons were also eliminated.

In 1833 the high hat was replaced by a chapeau - the "fore-and-aft" hat. Rank was designated by gold lace cuff stripes rather than buttons. Captains wore one stripe an inch wide; first lieutenants one stripe a half-inch wide; second lieutenants two half-inch stripes; and third lieutenants wore three one-quarter inch stripes.

Though this uniform was said to have met with general approval by the Revenue service officers, it raised a storm from the naval side of the sea services. Now that naval officers could no longer hold simultaneous commissions in the Revenue service (now known as the Revenue Marine), they were not pleased that revenue officer's uniforms were so similar to, and patterned upon, U. S. Navy uniforms.

The controversy was highlighted at a grand ball in Charleston, S.C., shortly after the new uniform regulations were adopted. In attendance were officers of several revenue cutters, as well as Commodore Jesse D. Elliott of the U.S. sloop-of-war Natchez and his staff. In the glitter of the evening, Elliott and staff were literally outshone by the appearance of Captain William A. Howard of the revenue cutter Jackson,

apparently fresh from Washington arrayed in the new uniform, complete with epaulettes and lace. The new uniform was well placed on Howard, a man of many accomplishments and described as one of the handsomest men of his day. Howard's impression was sufficient to compel Elliott to immediately complain to Secretary of the Navy Levi Woodbury demanding that the Revenue service uniform be modified to remove the resemblance to Navy uniforms. In particular, it seems that the wearing of epaulettes was objectionable. Woodbury moved from the Navy to the Treasury Department in 1834 where he immediately moved to correct this situation.

Secretary Woodbury directed a board of revenue officers to design a distinctive uniform without epaulettes. Failing to dissuade them from these shoulder decorations, the secretary retaliated by changing the color to gray. This uniform was apparently unanimously disliked in the Revenue Service. Their argument was the same as that used in the Civil War Confederate Navy: whoever heard of a sailor in a gray uniform?

The description of the new uniform began with a dark gray cloth coat with the nine button lapels and four on the cuffs and pocket flaps, one on the hip and three on the skirts. A band of black braid was worn above the cuffs and the braid was also to be on the outer seam of either gray or white pants.

A black silk cravat and buff vest with nine buttons were worn, with a black belt for the sword. The undress uniform was single-breasted with a standing braided collar. The dress uniform had a more modern looking rolling collar. Rank was distinguished by epaulettes and a descending number of buttons. Third lieutenants also omitted the braid on the cuff. The regulations authorized a plain cocked hat.

Under these regulations, petty officers and seamen wore jackets with five buttons. Under this was a white frock with blue facings on the collar and on the breast with a blue star in each corner of the collar as well as on the breast. The men wore white or blue trousers, depending on the season, along with a blue belt. Considering the officer's uniform controversy, it is curious that the enlisted men were given blue jackets. The button prescribed was no longer the national eagle or shield. It was impressed with the shield of the Treasury Department, with its balance motif, on a fouled anchor.

Such was the unpopularity of this gray uniform that within two years it succumbed to its critics and blue returned. However, the black braid and other details remained.

The cocked hat however, went from plain to ornate with gold tassels, four rows of gold bullion diagonally from top to bottom and a rosette on the left side. The two-piece sword belt clasp was to have the Treasury arms and anchor design in the center, surrounded by a burnished gold rim. For undress, a Navy regulation cloth cap was designated with two gold bands a half-inch wide. Two years subsequent to these regulations shoulder straps were authorized.

## 1840s through 1860s

The next major uniform change would come in the Civil War years, although minor changes were introduced in the 1840s and 1850s. In 1843, regulations described the earliest known Revenue service sword. This was a straight sword with Roman hilt and spring guard with elaborate engraving on the blade. Decorated with the spread eagle, the national shield, and a blue and gold bullion and silk sword knot, this was called the most handsome the service ever authorized. Prior to this regulation, swords were apparently either Navy type or left to the individual's preference.

In 1844, further means were sought to distinguish the revenue uniform from the Navy's. To accomplish this, the epaulettes, which were described as plain in the earlier regulations, were to be decorated with an anchor surmounting the Treasury shield. The same device was to be on the cap band. With typical service cost consciousness, the same die was to be used for both cap and epaulette devices, with the latter in silver and the cap ornament in gold. Captain Fraser, senior officer of the service at the time, wrote that if

all the officers cooperated and had these fabricated at the same place, the cost could be kept down to \$5 each.

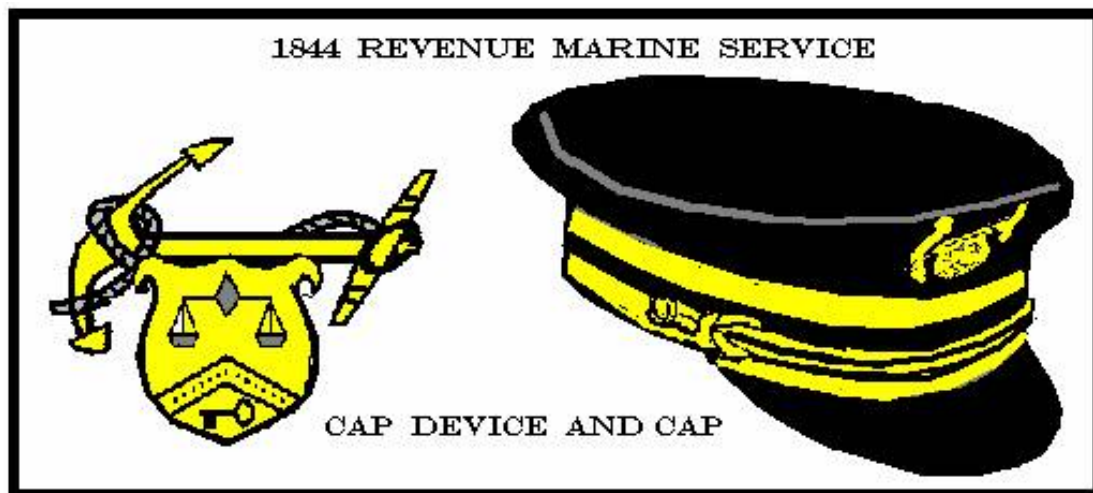
New vessel technology resulted in additions to the uniform regulations in 1845. Three years earlier, the first steam vessels were authorized for the Revenue Service. The first to go in commission were the Spencer and Legare, in 1844. At first, steam-engineering personnel were appointed on a temporary basis. Later, they were commissioned as officers: chief engineers or assistant engineers. The higher rank wore the first lieutenants uniform without the epaulette or strap, but wore the Treasury arms embroidered on the collar in gold. The third lieutenant's uniform was to be the assistant engineer's dress with the collar embroidery in silver.

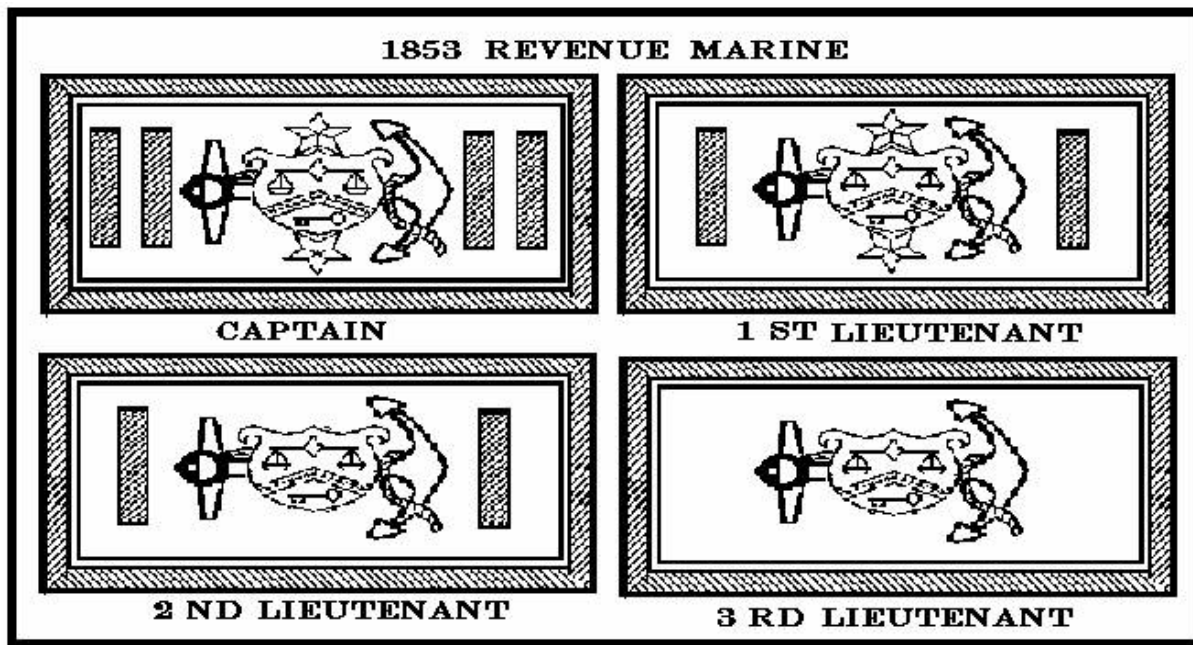
Changes in shoulder decorations came in 1853. Secretary James Guthrie ordered that lieutenants of all grades wear both epaulettes in their full dress uniforms. The shoulder strap was officially authorized at this time, although some unofficial straps may have appeared as early as 1838. Originally, the strap on the shoulder was simply a device to attach an epaulette. The number of epaulettes and their position showed rank, thus rank could still be determined by these straps, even when the epaulettes were not being worn.

In the Navy, narrow lace shoulder straps were authorized in 1830 and rank distinguishing devices were added to wider straps in 1840. In the Revenue Marine regulations of 1853, captains were designated by a fouled anchor, Treasury shield and a star above and below, plus the time honored bars at each end. Lieutenants lost one of the twin bars and second lieutenants lost stars as well. Third lieutenants wore a strap without devices on the field. The straps themselves were of blue cloth with raised gold edgings. On the caps, the double gold bands were replaced by a single band of gold lace, one and one-half inches wide.

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## U. S. REVENUE MARINE ~ 1840S TO 1860S





## 1860s

In 1862, the major change was the elimination of the body coat (equivalent to today's cutaway coat). The officer's full dress was now a frock coat similar to the single-breasted undress coat, but double-breasted with the standard nine buttons per row. This uniform was, as far as a cut was concerned, identical to the standard undress Navy uniform of the Civil War era. In contrast to earlier uniforms, the Civil War uniforms were loose in cut, and, as evident in photos, more often than not showed a harvest of wrinkles. The dress and undress uniform coat was the same but epaulettes were designated for full dress and shoulder straps for undress wear. Two one-half inch gold lace stripes above each cuff identified a captain and lieutenants wore single stripes. The coats could be worn with single breasted buff, white, or blue vests, and either white or blue pants. White was authorized for warm climates.

While epaulettes were to be plain, both shoulder straps and cap ornaments designated rank. Oddly enough, the cap and strap ornaments did not necessarily match. The captain's wreath on his cap enclosed a Treasury shield but his shoulder straps had crossed anchors. The chief engineer's wreath enclosed a typical ship's paddle wheel motif and a star but on the strap there was a wheel with an anchor. All lieutenants had the shield and anchor on both cap and straps, but twin bars were authorized for first lieutenants, single bars for second lieutenants and no bars for third lieutenants. Assistant engineers had either a paddle wheel or omitted the wheel on both cap and straps. These regulations called for a navy regulation sword: a curved hilt weapon with typical oval hand guard. However, the earlier type, mentioned previously, remained in use. A straw hat with black band was allowed for summer wear.

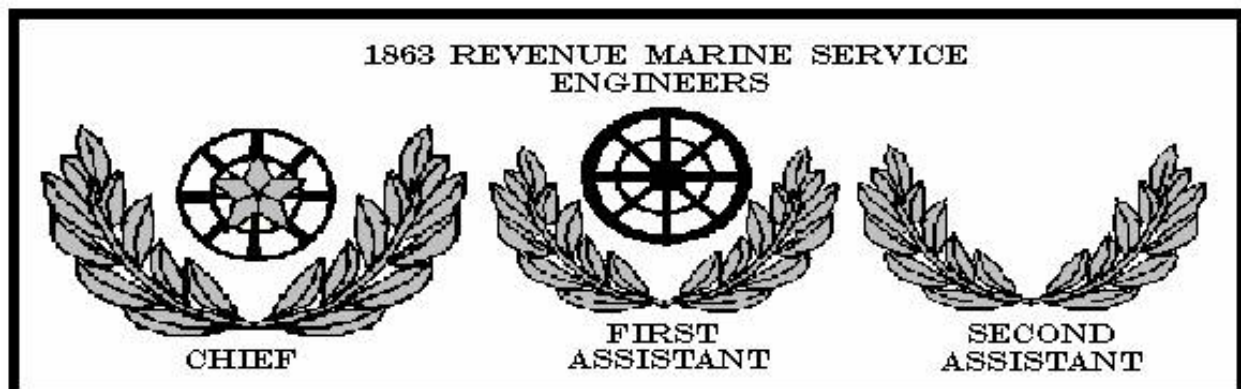
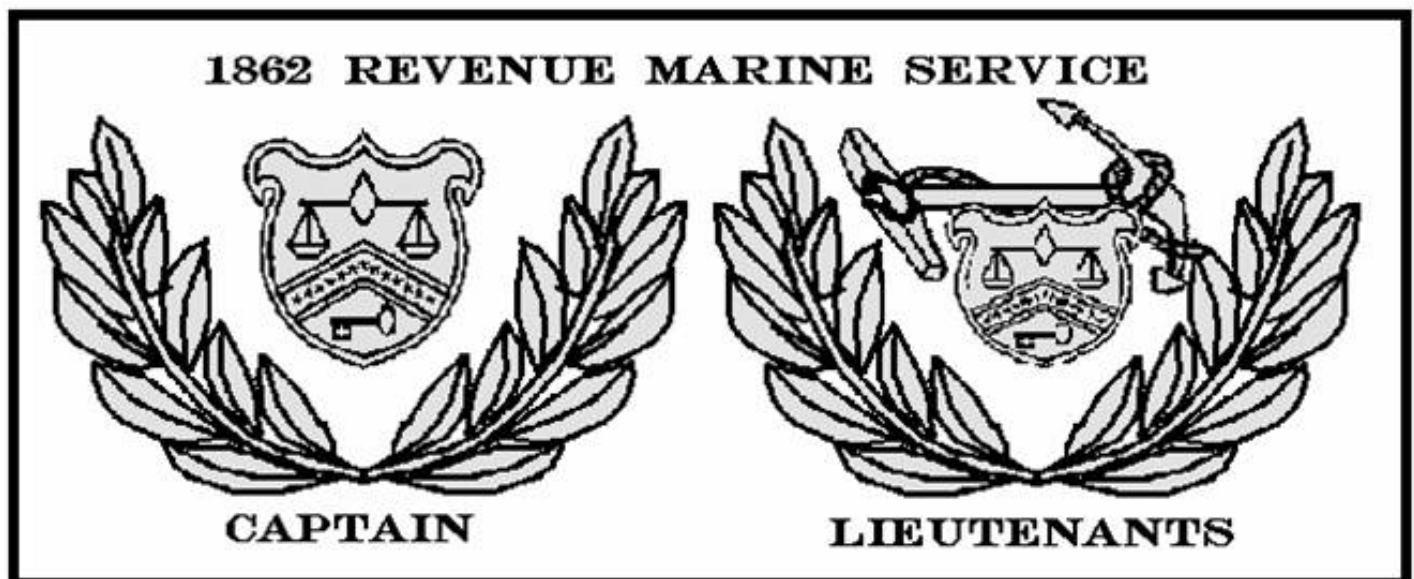
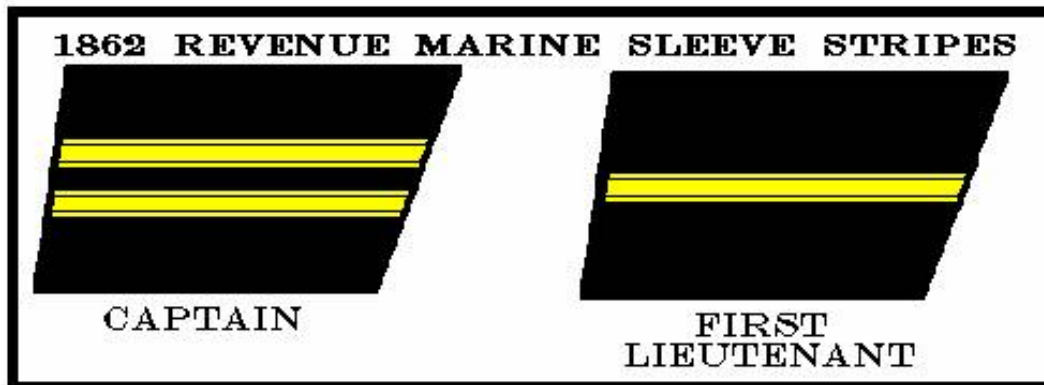
Petty officers were authorized a double-breasted blue jacket with nine buttons on the lapels and blue pantaloons. All other enlisted men (seamen, firemen, coal passers, stewards, cooks and boys) wore white or blue frocks with opposite color facings. Blue or white trousers could be worn with blue cloth cap or a low crowned, wide-brimmed straw hat. The latter was common 19th century naval attire and usually was worn for summer or tropical duty.

New uniform regulations issued in 1864 mainly changed the rank designations. Now four one-half inch sleeve stripes marked the Revenue Marine captain. A space of one-half inch separated the upper stripe from the other three, which were separated by only the one-quarter inch.



Additionally, a small embroidered national shield was placed above the stripes on the sleeve. Cap and shoulder strap devices were again changed. Captains now had crossed anchors on both headgear and shoulders, as well as gold leaves at each end of the straps. Lieutenants now had a national shield, stripes and three stars, in place of the Treasury shield. The paddle wheel cap ornament for engineers remained, but twin bars were added to the straps for chief engineers, single bars for first assistants, and no bars for second assistants. Chief engineers had three sleeve stripes, assistants two and one for first and second engineers, respectively.

## U. S. REVENUE MARINE ~ 1860s



**1862 REVENUE MARINE**



**CAPTAIN**



**1 ST LIEUTENANT**



**2 ND LIEUTENANT**



**3 RD LIEUTENANT**

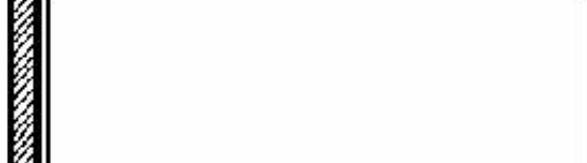
**1862 REVENUE MARINE**



**CHIEF ENGINEER**

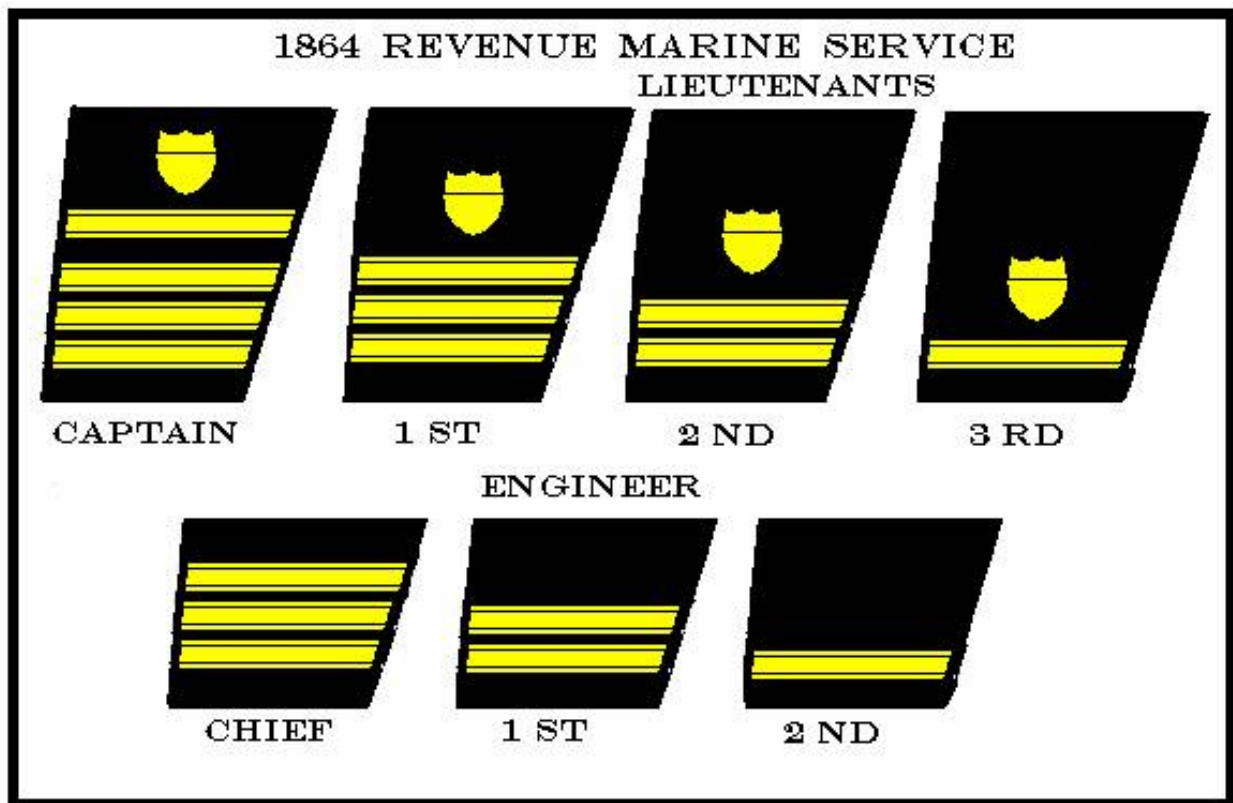


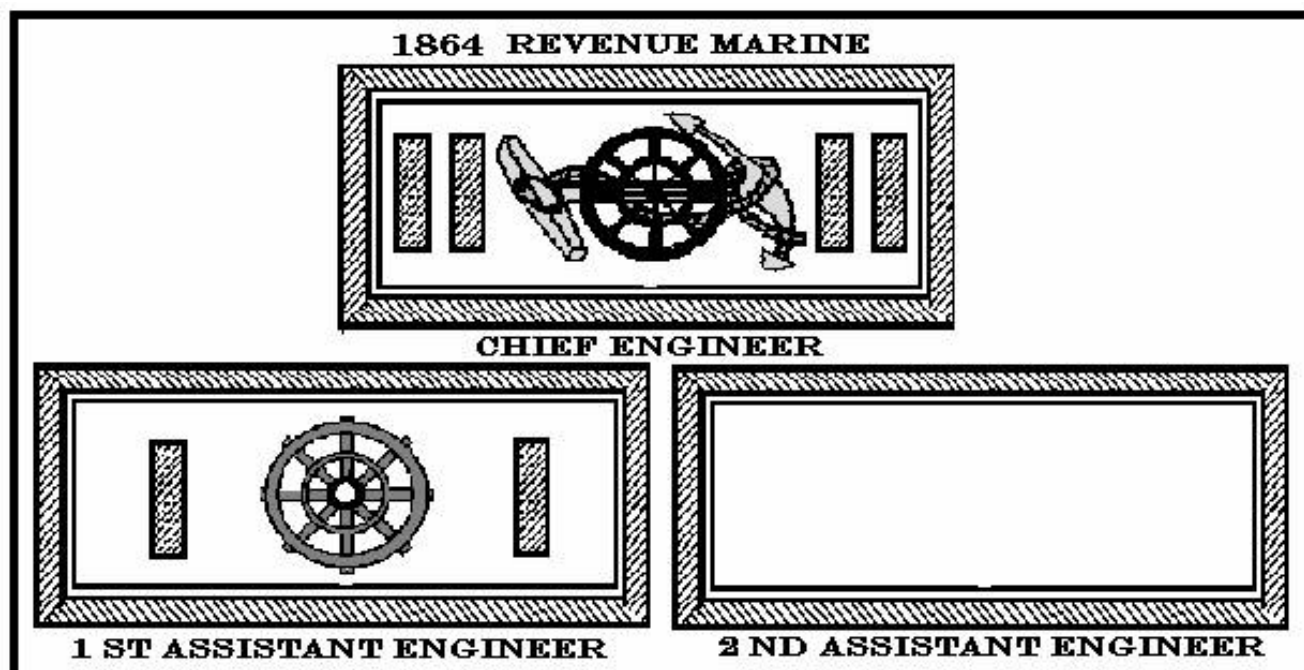
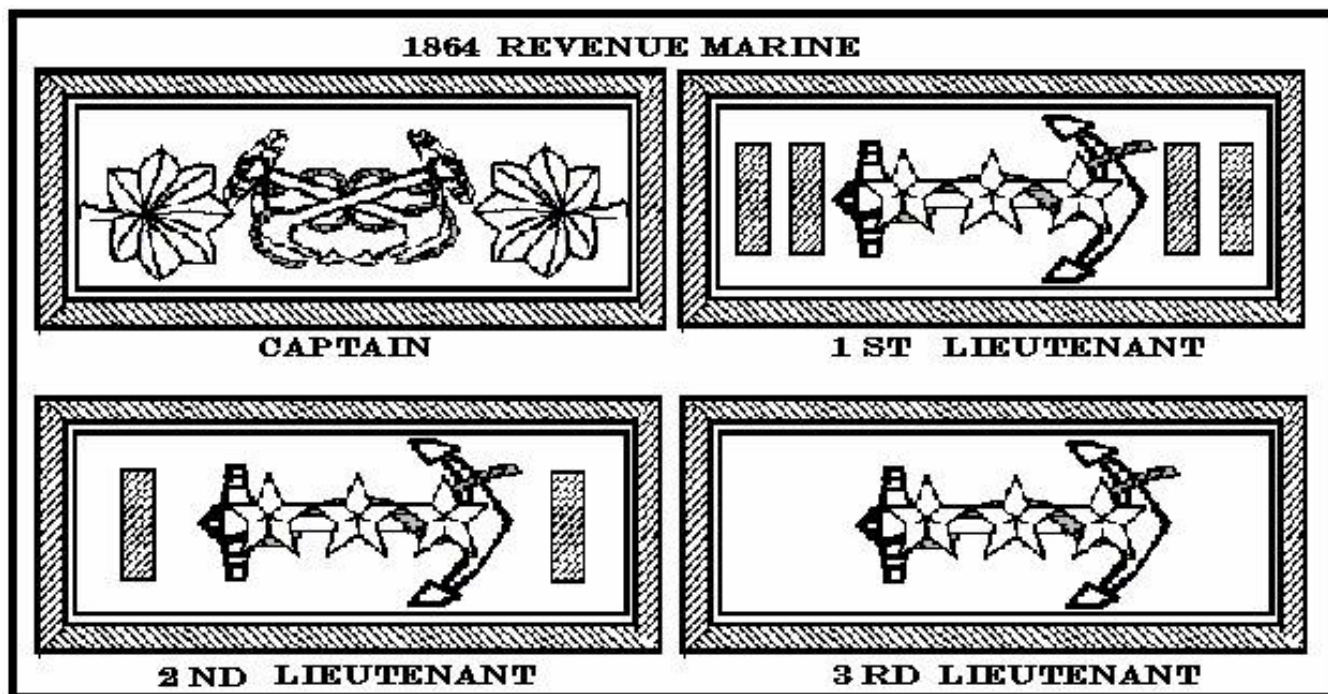
**1 ST ASSISTANT ENGINEER**



**2 ND ASSISTANT ENGINEER**







### 1870s ~ 1890s

At this time there were few distinguishing features for revenue officer uniforms, compared to the Navy. Shoulder strap devices were gold rather than silver, engineers had a paddle wheel as opposed to a four leaf stylized ship's prop and Naval officers had no device above the cuff stripes, except for executive stars for line officers. Note also that both services abolished the cocked hat for full dress during the war.

After a couple of decades of general satisfaction with the uniform, 1871 brought another controversial set of regulations. These called for the reinstatement of the swallowtail coat, this time with seven buttons per lapel and four buttons on the cuffs. These buttons bore the treasury shield with U to the left and S to the right. The vest was also seven-buttoned and the blue or white pants had a black silk cord decorating the

outside seam. The undress coat was a seven button double-breasted version of the popular civilian sack coat which was very similar to the modern suit coat.

However, the controversy over these new uniforms did not center on the cut or style, but on the ornaments and devices. Shoulder straps and lace were abandoned and the rolling collar was decorated with a horizontal foul anchor, with an oak leaf perpendicular to the anchor's shank and the letters U. S. R. M. in Old English forming an arc around the upper part of the leaf. Epaulettes displayed the fouled anchor with oak leaves which was patterned after the U. S. Naval lieutenant commanders device. The U.S.R.M. in Old English was also arched over a vertical anchor on the cap.

The lieutenant's uniform substituted bars on the collar for the oak leaf. Engineers wore an embroidered four-bladed propeller. These devices, particularly the Old English letters, were described as the poorest and ugliest ever authorized - and, due to their small size, nearly un-decipherable from a distance. Many officers simply refused to comply with the new regulations.

In two years the objectionable features were discarded officially and shoulder straps were restored. At this time the cap ornament was standardized for all officers. This was the spread eagle with shield grasping a fouled anchor and a semi-circle of thirteen stars. The basic elements of this emblem have remained unchanged ever since, with only the elimination of the stars and re-configuration of the eagle's wings.

New regulations were promulgated in 1878, reverting to the nine button double-breasted frock coat for undress use. The tail coat was retained for full dress.

The sack coat was authorized for off duty and watchstanding. This was single-breasted with five buttons and was worn without lace or shoulder straps. The cap no longer had gold braid around it but instead had a black band of silk between upper and lower welts. It was now the same diameter on top as on the base. The sword was no longer the Navy type but was double-edged, with dagger hilt and white grip, 26 to 29 inches long.

Epaulettes continued in the 1871 pattern. The center device on the shoulder straps for line officers was a foul anchor with a perpendicular shield. Captains had oak leaves at each end and lieutenants the familiar bars. The obsolete paddle wheel on engineer's straps was replaced by a four-bladed propeller and the number of bars at the ends denoted the ranks. Rank devices on sack coats were similar to the shoulder straps. They were sewn on the collars and consisted of oak leaves and bars, accompanied by a shield for all except engineers.

No major changes were introduced in the Revenue service uniform until 1891, when fashion again changed the look of military dress in general. New to the Revenue Service was the military tunic. This item had been introduced into the Navy in the 1870s and its type can still be seen at military academies. It is a tight-fitting, single-breasted coat with low-standing collar. The most distinctive characteristic is the fly-front, concealing the buttons. The Revenue Cutter Service version of this was dark blue with a trim of black mohair braid, one and one-quarter inch wide. Inside this was narrow silk braid edging. Grade designators were the same in number and width as the dress uniforms but in black braid. For summer, a white duck version was authorized, trimmed with linen braid. This was designated the service coat and was standard until around WWI. (Note that early in the 1890s, the service discarded the title Revenue Marine and Revenue Cutter Service became the official designation.)

Also in 1891 an optional full dress uniform for social occasions was authorized. This was cut away as was the full dress but with a rolling collar and five buttons worn with a low cut waistcoat, single-breasted with four revenue buttons. Worn without epaulettes or shoulder straps, this was similar to the formal tuxedo of civilian dress but with cuff braid and shield device on the sleeves.

The headgear of the 1891 regulations included a cocked hat of black beaver, with a cockade on the right

side. For service and undress, a helmet was authorized. This was made of cork or other suitable material with a high crown and narrow brim. It was covered with light tan linen duck. This tropical helmet was similar to British colonial uniform headgear.

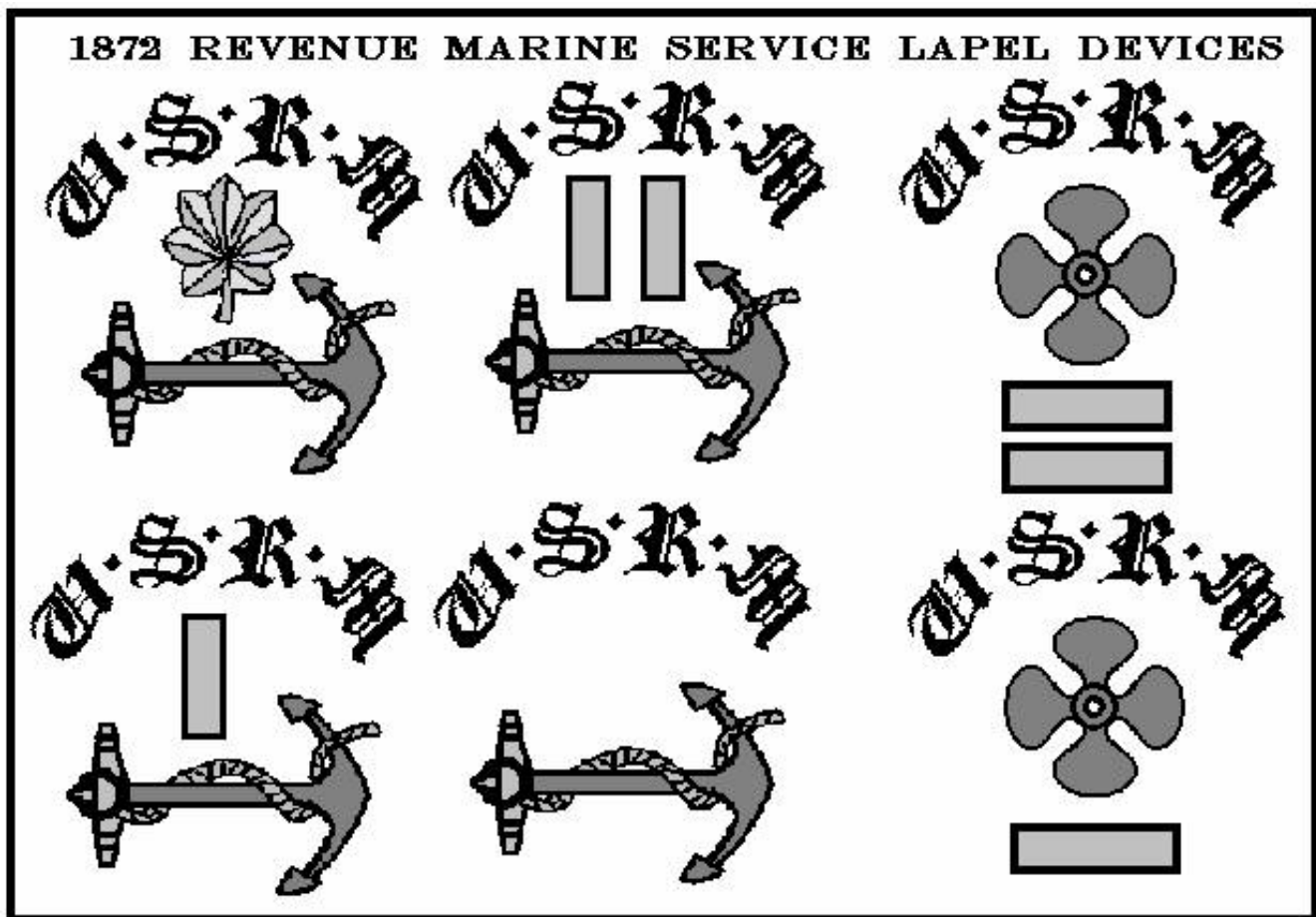
Petty officers, Boatswains, Gunners, Carpenters, and Masters at Arms were allowed a double-breasted coat with rolling collar. Cooks and stewards wore a single-breasted coat, but with rubber-like buttons rather than the revenue buttons of the double-breasted coat. Other petty officers, Quartermasters, Coxswains, and Oilers and other enlisted personnel still retained the sailor suit of traditional design, complete with flat hat with its black ribbon hanging behind. The cap talley had "U S R S" and the name of the wearer's vessel in gilt around the front of the ribbon.

Rating badges were worn on the right coat sleeve. A boatswain wore crossed anchors; a gunner wore crossed gun barrels; a master-at-arms wore crossed keys over an anchor; a quartermaster wore crossed flags below a ship's wheel; a coxswain wore an arrow crossing an anchor; and an oiler wore a propeller.

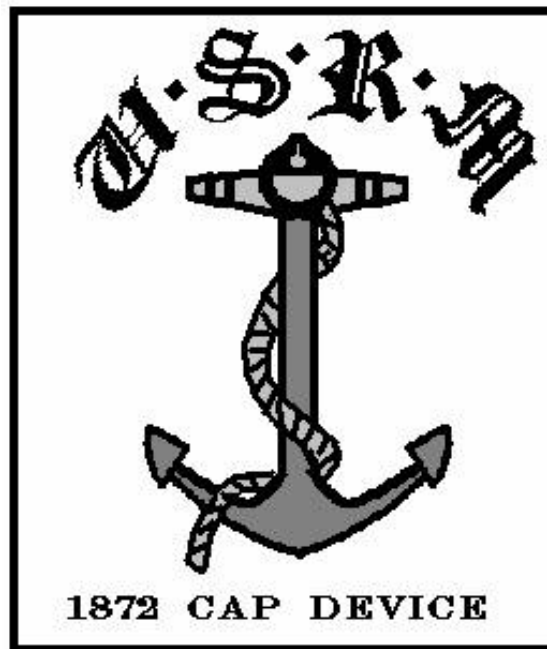
In 1902, probably as the result of the service's cooperation with the navy during the Spanish American War, Revenue Cutter Service officers were given relative rank with naval officers. Three years later, 1905 new sleeve insignia were prescribed. Three stripes now indicated a captain: a narrow center stripe, with a half-inch wide stripe above and below. First lieutenants wore two-half inch stripes; second lieutenants, one stripe of half-inch braid below a quarter-inch stripe; and third lieutenants, one narrow stripe.

## U. S. REVENUE MARINE ~ 1870'S & 1880'S

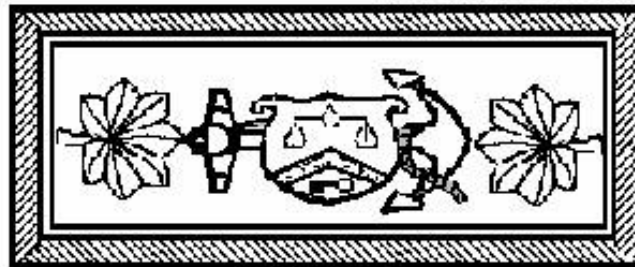
### 1872 REVENUE MARINE SERVICE LAPEL DEVICES



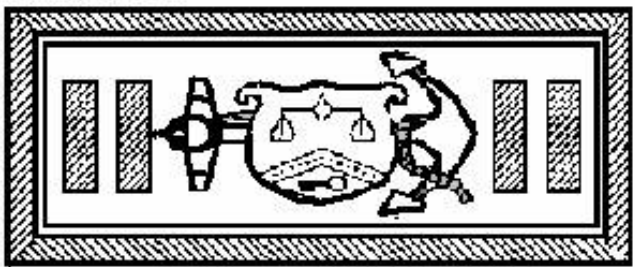




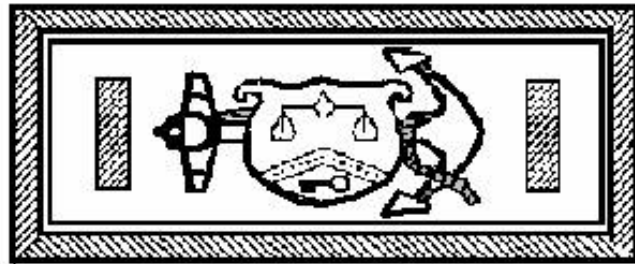
1873 REVENUE MARINE



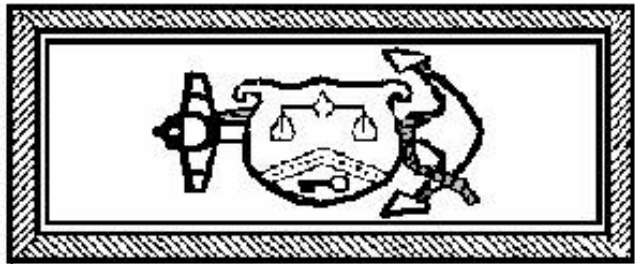
CAPTAIN



1ST LIEUTENANT

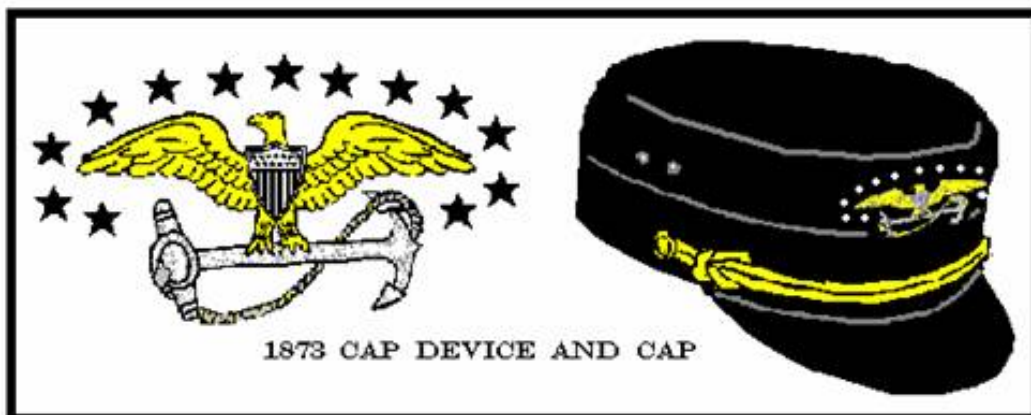
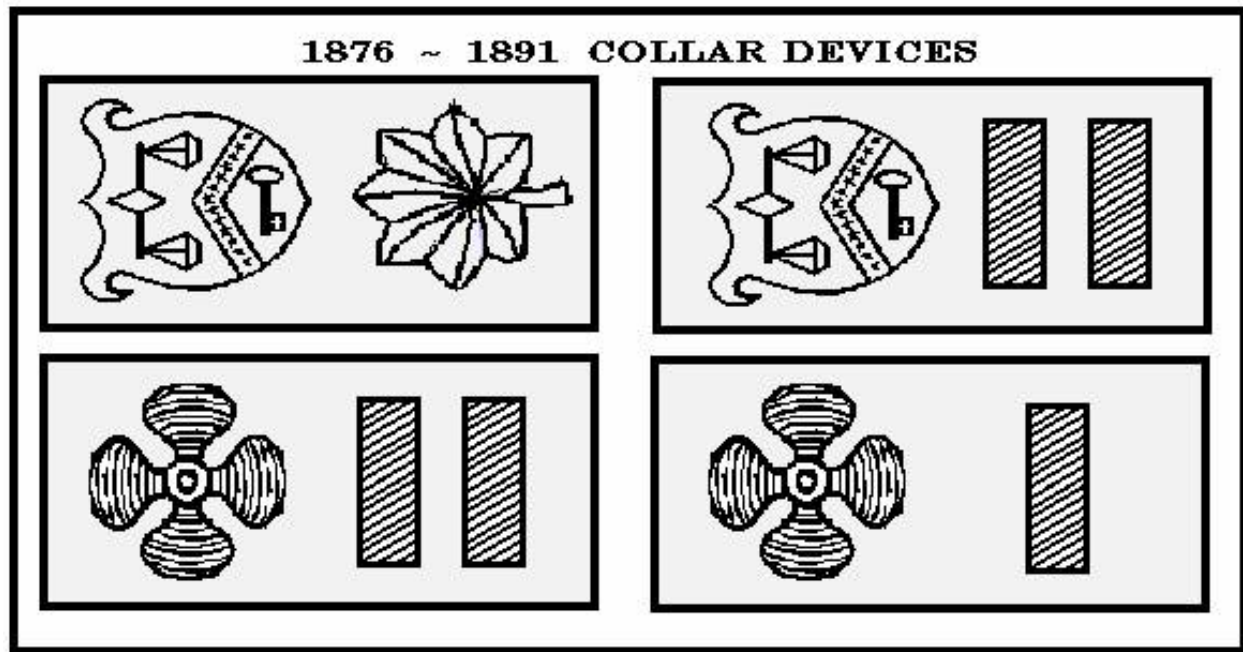
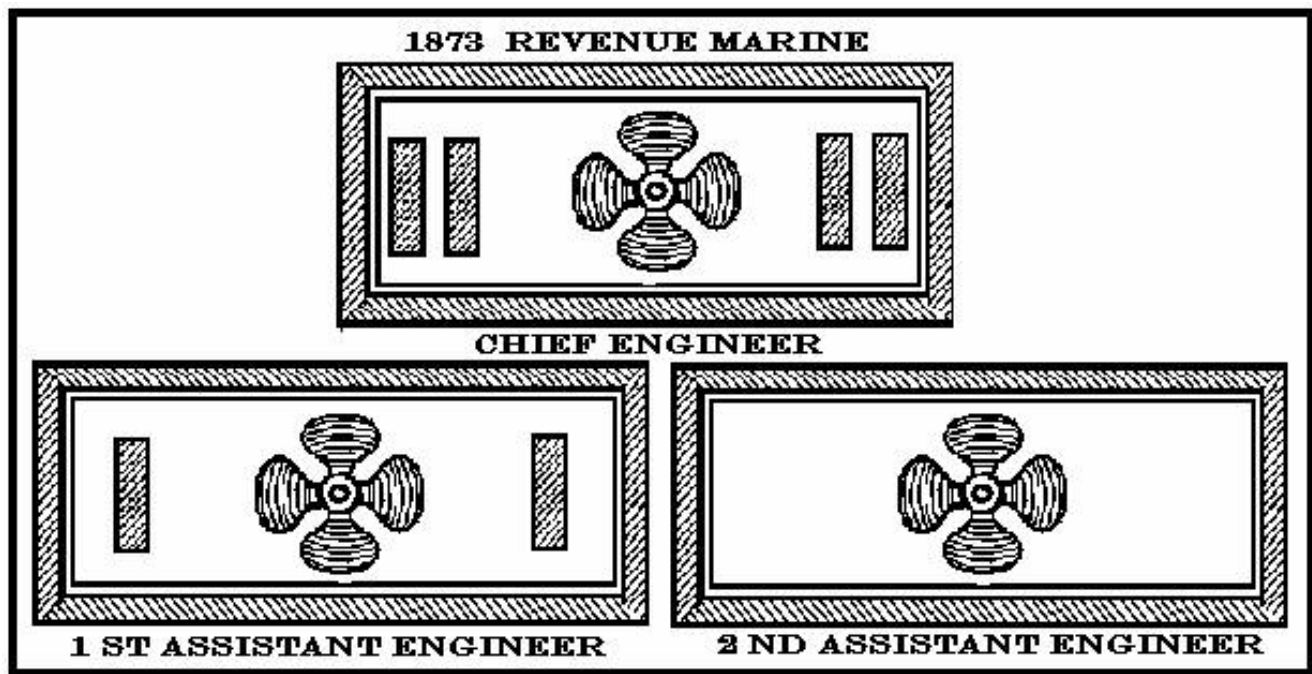


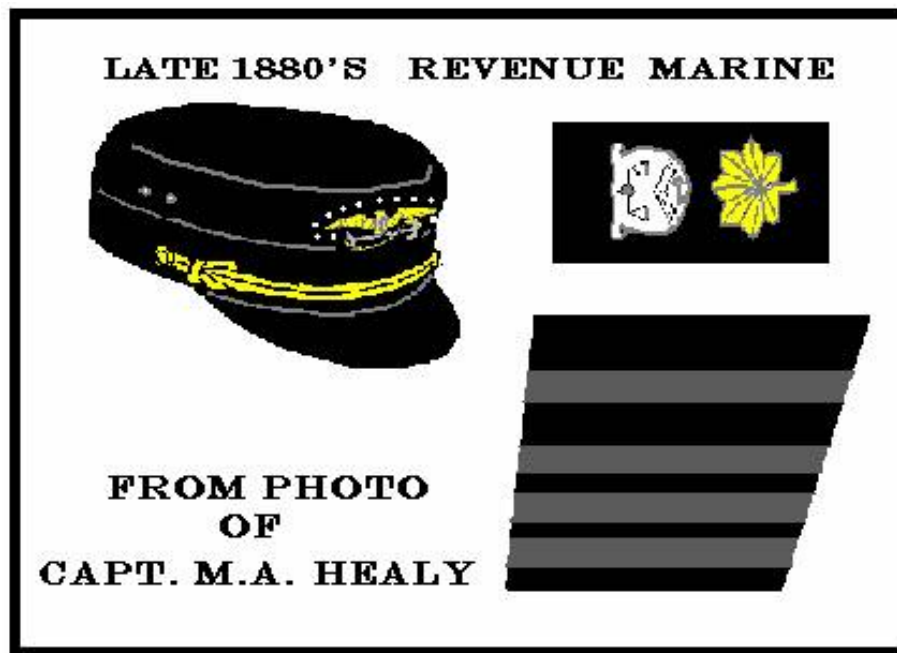
2ND LIEUTENANT



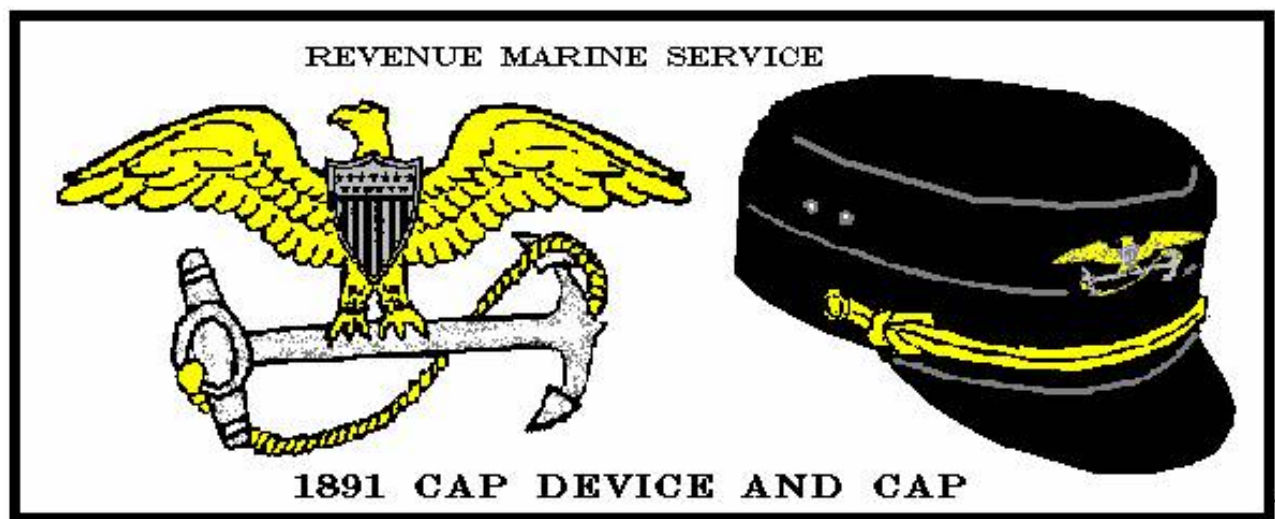
3RD LIEUTENANT



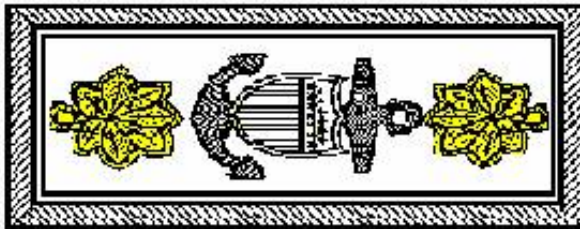




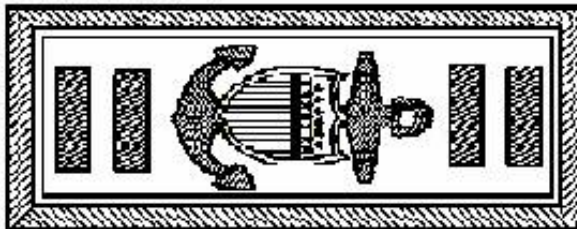
## U. S. REVENUE MARINE ~ 1891



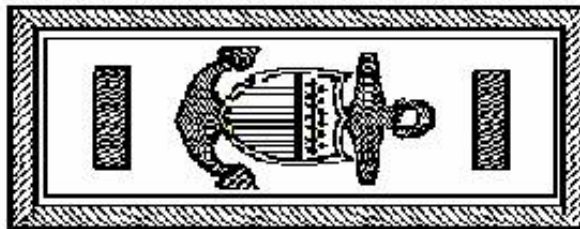
1891 SHOULDER STRAPS



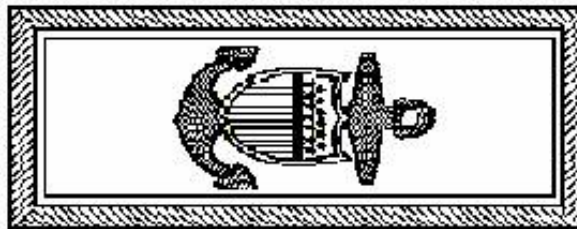
CAPTAIN



1 ST LIEUTENANT

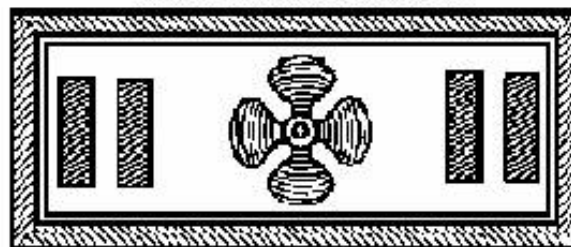


2 ND LIEUTENANT

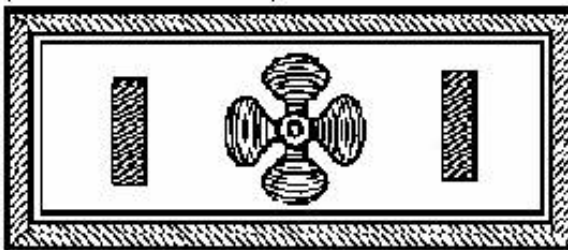


3 RD LIEUTENANT

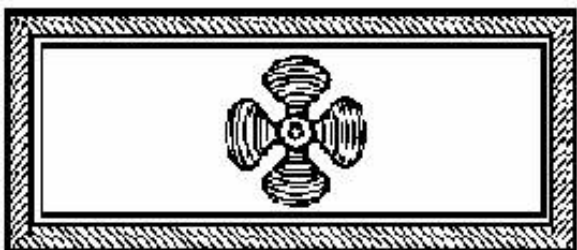
1891 ENGINEERS



CHIEF



1 ST ASSISTANT



2 ND ASSISTANT



# 1891 GOLD SLEEVE LACE

1/4 INCH



CAPTAIN



1 ST



2 ND

LIEUTENANTS



3 RD

## ENGINEERS



CHIEF



1 ST ASSISTANT



2 ND ASSISTANT

# 1891 REVENUE MARINE SERVICE PETTY OFFICERS



BOATSWAIN



GUNNER



MASTER  
AT  
ARMS



CARPENTER



QUARTERMASTER



COXSWAIN

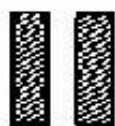


OILER

## 1891 REVENUE MARINE COLLAR DEVICES



CAPTAIN



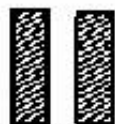
1 ST LIEUTENANT



2 ND LIEUTENANT



3 RD LIEUTENANT



CHIEF ENGINEER



1 ST ASSISTANT



2 ND ASSISTANT

## 1900 GOLD SLEEVE LACE LIEUTENANT 'S



CAPTAIN



1 ST



2 ND



3 RD

## 1905 GOLD SLEEVE LACE LIEUTENANT 'S



CAPTAIN



1 ST



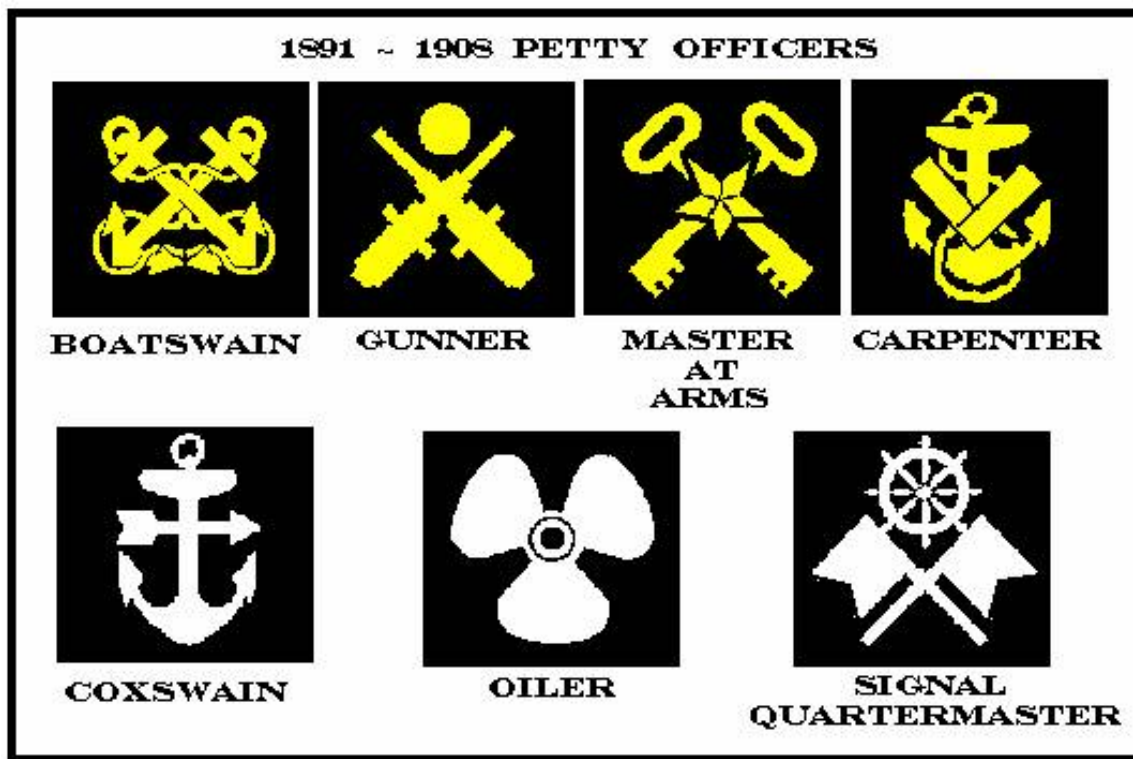
2 ND



3 RD

ENGINEERS DID NOT WEAR THE SHIELD





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Added: January 2007